Red Action

YOUR HEALTH SERVICE

NO. 39 FEB 1988 20p

MAJOR SURGERY NEEDED

ALTON BILL JOIN THE FIGHT

Red Action article

In the run-up to the 1983 General Election, Margaret Thatcher made her now famous remark "The National Health Service is safe with us." She made this statement in spite of the fact that, even as she said it, her government was carrying out systematic cut-backs in every department of the NHS and, as any Health Service employee could easily have told you, had been doing so ever since it had been elected in 1979 and, as we now know, was fully intent on continuing with this policy.

Thatcher's statement was, of course, nothing more than a bare-faced lie, aimed at a gullible public, as to her government's long-term aims. These are nothing less than the eventual total disbandment of the NHS as we know it. This is the logical conclusion of modern Tory philosophy, which preaches ever increasing cut-backs in public spending in order yo pay for tax cuts.

This suits the Tories and their rich friends down to the ground. After all, if you are earning thousands or even tens of thousands a week, then even the smallest tax cut is going to mean quite a substantial sum - more than enough to cover your contributions to a private health scheme, in which case you don't have to worry about the NHS. For the vast majority of us, whose income is only a fraction of this, the couple of pounds or so extra in the pocket gained by these tax cuts is worth very little, especially when weighed against the run-down and eventual disbandment of our only protection against ill-health, accident and disease.

ABOLITION

You don't have to take our word about the Tories' intentions. A couple of years ago, a report was leaked to the Guardian newspaper about the existence of a blueprint for the total abolition of the NHS and its replacement by a system of

insurance schemes ie by paid health care. When this was publicised, the Tories were very quick to deny that they had any intention of putting this plan into practise (so why have it in the first place?) but they are, of course, aware that the idea of running down and abolishing such an established institution as the NHS is a very touchy subject. Most people alive today have grown up with it and regard it as a natural feature of society. If the Tories, when they came to power, had just suddenly announced "That's it. We're closing it down on such-and-such a date," it would have provoked an overwhelming wave of outrage and opposition.

That is why they have had to proceed very slowly and carefully with their plans, concealing and denying their true intentions, while, all the time, they are working to undermine the existence of the NHS. They go about this in two ways. Firstly, they attack the ideology which says that society deserves an efficient and free Health Service, putting forward arguments such as that people should stand on their own two feet and not expect society to mollycoddle them with "free" health care (as if the people who use the NHS aren't the ones who produce the wealth which funds it in the first place) or by trying to argue that "we" can't afford it, saying things like "Much as we, of course, agree with the idea of a Health Service, the economic situation at the moment means that we just have to make certain cut-backs."

The obvious reply to this is "Great, let's change the system." If the economic system is so inefficient that it produces these economic crises which make cut-backs in such a vital service necessary, then let's get rid of it and establish a new, socialist system. Funnily enough, that solution to the problem never seems to occur to the Tories. But then why should it when the effects of their solution of cut-backs and more cut-backs are felt only by the working class and not by themselves.

ECONOMIC CRISES

Even leaving aside the idea of changing the system and assuming the continuance of the capitalist system, the idea that economic crises which are part of capitalism explain and justify the need for cuts in vital services is still total rubbish. Economic crises didn't stop the Tories immediately finding billions of pounds to go and fight a war to ensure that a Union Jack could be planted on a rock in the South Atlantic and kept there. Economic crises do not force them to apply the same principle of cuts to their Trident missile programme.

In spite of economic crises, there would still be enough wealth available to fund an efficient and adequate Health Service if that is what the government wanted. It isn't that the economy cannot afford to run an efficient Health Service. It's just that they choose to spend the money on other things, such as military matters, prison building, paying the massive amounts it cost to defeat the miners in the 1984/5 strike. They consider those things more important than a Health Service for the working class. Simple example - police and nurses both supposedly play vitally important roles in the upkeep of society. Since the Tories came to power in 1979, police wages have risen by over 100 per cent while nurses wages have risen by only about 20 per cent.

CUT-BACKS

The second way the Tories attack the Health Service is the more direct route - by actual cut-backs. They do not, of course, do this in one big, sweeping and highly noticeable assault but by small, systematic and continuous cuts, chipping away a bit at a time, hoping that nobody notices too much. Eventually, the accumulative effect of these cuts has to make itself felt. This is what we are beginning to see now as stories of people dying through lack of equipment, resources standing idle through lack of trained operatives, and anger, even threats of strike action from Health Service employees who are incensed by attempts to cut their living and working standards, begin to multiply.

The signs are that we may have reached a significant stage in the development of the Tories grand design for the Health Service. On 21 January, speaking in Parliament at the time of a wave of publicity about deteriorating standards in the Health

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The scene at Hounslow hospital after bailiffs moved in to force closure - a perfect example of the Tory government's plans for the NHS.

Red Action article

The Abortion Amendment Bill, introduced by Liberal MP David Alton to reduce the time at which a woman may legally have an abortion from 28 weeks into pregnancy to 18 weeks, passed its second reading in the House of Commons. As the first reading is a formality not requiring a vote, the second reading stage is the one at which it becomes clear how much support a Bill has amongst MPs. In a free vote - one where each MP makes up his/her mind without a Party whip pressurising an MP to vote as their Party says - the Bill was approved by a majority of 45 votes.

The Bill will now be referred to a special committee of MPs and then to the House of Lords and, at both these stages, some changes may be made to the Bill before it is returned to the Commons for its third, and final, reading. It is generally expected that the Bill will be amended to a "compromise" of 22 or 24 weeks and it is reported that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher - who abstained from the second reading vote - would support the Bill if such an amendment was made.

To prevent the Bill becoming law, a major campaign is necessary to change the minds of enough MPs who supported it in the second reading vote so that it is defeated at the third reading stage. The Fight the Alton Bill campaign will be encouraged by the success of the 1979 campaign against a similar Bill put forward at that time by John Corrie MP. That Bill was passed at its second reading. Some 80,000 demonstrated their opposition to it and protests were made in the Commons by women in the public gallery and, despite a Tory whip to support the Bill, it was defeated at the third reading stage. A similar success is needed now to stop the Alton Bill becoming law.

Otherwise, the religious 'Back to Victorian Values' camp will impose a serious defeat for working class women. Whether the number of weeks is 18, 22 or 24, it will mean that the right of a woman to do as she sees fit with her own body will be eroded. Worse still, no-one expects that to be the end of the matter for, flushed by such a victory, the anti-abortionists and their alliance of moral and religious freaks are unwilling to take long in pressing for further abortion restrictions, leading to their eventual aim of making abortion illegal completely.

BACK-STREET ABORTIONS

Even putting to one side the fundamental right of choice, this will mean a return to back street abortion and inevitable injury and death to working class women in operations carried out by illegal quacks or doctors who have been struck off the medical register for all manner of malpractices. Wealthy women will, of course, not have to endure these dangers as they will be able to afford to travel to a country where abortion is still legal and there to pay for the best treatment.

The debate is far from over yet and Red Action urges everyone to get involved in the Fight the Alton Bill campaign as best they can. The March edition of RA will include details of the national demonstration against the Bill scheduled for 19 March and we will be looking for a full turn-out from members, supporters and readers alike.

ALTON'S FAKE FOETUS

Anti abortion supporters of David Alton's Bill claimed this picture shows a likeness of a baby in the womb when the mother is in the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy. It turned out to be a photo of a baby stillborn in Russia about twenty years ago which has been preserved in a special chemical for scientific research. "We didn't mean to deceive," claimed the anti-Abortionists when the fraud was discovered.

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BRITISH JUSTICE SHAMED

HEALTH SERVICE

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Service, Margaret Thatcher stated clearly and unequivocally that no extra cash was to be made available. For her to take such a bold and uncompromising position on such a sensitive issue at such a time suggests that the Tories now believe that their attacks on the NHS have reached such a level that they can no longer continue to conceal what they are doing and so have nothing to gain by trying to do so.

It may be that they think they have now created a climate where Health Service cuts are more acceptable, that people have become resigned to the fact they they are going to happen. Whatever their thinking, the boldness of Thatcher's stance suggests they are in no mood to retreat and we can expect the attacks on the Health Service and the crisis within it to continue and accelerate.

STRIKE ACTION

It may even be the government's intention to try to provoke Health Service employees into strike action, reasoning that, by doing so, they can take the spotlight off themselves and try to push the blame for the NHS crisis on to the employees. You can just picture the stories in the press. Frail OAPs and sick young children, suffering and dying because callous health workers have been stirred up by communist agitators, while a distraught Mrs. Thatchert pleads with the strikers to return to work for the sake of these innocent victims.

That would be a callous and cynical move, well worthy of a callous and cynical bunch. To run down the Service to such an extent that the workers in it are left with no option other than strike action in order to publicise and protest about what is happening and then manipulate the media to throw the blame for the crisis in the Service on to those taking part in that action.

INNOCENT VICTIMS

The truth is that, if the Tories and their media-owning friends get their way, there won't be a Health Service at all to look after innocent victims or anybody else. The only way the Health Service as we know it will be saved is by industrial action by Health workers and, very importantly, by other workers in support of them. The responsibility for any innocent victims of such action lies squarely and entirely with those who have wilfully and deliberately caused the crisis which now exists in the NHS - the Tory government.

In the event of any such industrial action, the task and responsibility of socialists is clear. It is to stand 100 per cent alongside the Health workers, to suport them and help them combat the barrage of lies and propaganda to which they will be subjected and to help bring home to everyone the real issue at stake - the very existence of the National Health Service.

Going, going....

The Tories have had a triumphant time in the last nine years, winning one victory after another against the supposed "heavy battalions" of the working class - miners, printworkers, railworkers. They have achieved these victories, in the main, not because of any lack of fighting spirit and determination on the part of the workers involved, but because of spinelessness on the part of most Trade Union leaders and lack of solidarity from other sections of the working class. Most of the working class have not seen these fights as their own fight as well.

However, for all the apparent political apathy of so many sections of the working class, it must surely be obvious to every working class person that the NHS is very much their business and, if the realities of what is at stake are made clear enough to them, it might just be possible to begin to build an effective, united working class fightback.

No-one would ever accuse the Health workers of being one of the big guns of the labour movement but, if the Tories in their arrogance born of continuous victory decide that they are next in line to be trampled on, they might just light a fire which flares a good deal hotter than they are used to handling.

HOW LABOUR LOSE OUT

The modern National Health Service was established by the National Health Services Act, which became law on 5 July, 1948. It was the culmination of the dreams and aspirations of several generations of progressive and enlightened thinkers. Free health care and protection for all, irrespective of social class or status, was a massive step forward for society from the dark days when health was something to be bought and paid for like any other commodity and those without the means to pay had to do without.

The establishment of the NHS was just part of a wave of reform and change, which was then sweeping the country. The Labour government, which had been returned just after the end of the Second World War with a massive majority, was establishing what was to become known as the Welfare State. The Welfare State was to bring great advances in the quality of life for working class people with more, better and cheaper housing through a massive council house building programme, better and more readily available education for their children and the biggest and most valuable change of all, the NHS - the jewel in the crown of the Welfare State.

Many Labour party supporters are very fond of pointing back to this era as proof of what can be achieved through the Parliamentary system. Why bother with all of this silly talk of revolution and overthrowing the system, they say. All you need to do is get a majority in Parliament and you can implement socialism a bit at a time with reforms like those achieved in the forties. Just get us back in and we will start to repair the damage done by the last nine years of Thatcherism.

On the face of it, it sounds quite a convincing argument. However, a closer look at some facts suggests differently. For a start, the present series of cuts in the Health Service and other vital services were started, not by the Tories but by the Labour government of Harold Wilson in 1974. Now, why, you may ask, should a Labour government begin to attack and dismantle the very thing which is supposed to be the crowning achievement in the Labour party's history?

The answer is quite simple. In 1974, the country's economy was in such a mess that the Labour government was forced to ask for a huge loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to be able to sort out the economy. Those who control the IMF, an assortment of mega-rich and powerful owners of the very largest business conglomerates, agreed to give the loan on the condition that the government made massive cuts in public spending, including spending on the NHS. The IMF's reasons for insisting on this were quite simple. When an economy is in crisis, there is much less money available to be had as profits by business. Reductions in public spending free that money to the open market, making it available to be turned into profits for the kind of people who run the IMF.

LABOUR COMPLIANCE

The Labour government had no choice but to comply. To have refused and lost the loan would have risked total chaos and, possibly, the collapse of the system, which, of course, is the last thing the Labour party wanted as it believes in maintaining and defending the system in order to work for change within it. So, it was a case of 'as much as we don't want to make these cuts, the economic system means we have to.' Sounds familiar?

REFORMIST

What this example shows us is that the capacity of a reformist movement to achieve and maintain reforms is dependent not on the amount of popular support it enjoys but on the state of the capitalist system at the time. The reason why the Labour government of the late forties was able to achieve such major reforms and advances was not because their large Parliamentary majority meant they were able to do whatever they wanted. It was because the capitalist economic system was, at the time, booming and expanding so there was enough wealth to pay for the reforms without adversely affecting the system or the profits of the capitalist class. Put crudely, the capitalists were making enough to be able to afford to dish out a few goodies. Indeed, at the time, reforms even suited the capitalist class to a certain extent because it needed a better educated and healthier working class so they could understand and operate the ever-increasing level of new technology emerging in this period of economic expansion.

But, and it is a very big but, when the system moves into crisis and starts to go wrong (as the capitalist system almost certainly will), then the only way the capitalist class can defend its position and wealth is by clawing back the goodies dished out in the good times, just as they are doing now. The present government is, of course, quite willing to carry out this task for them but, even if we had a Labour government, although it may not attack services with the same sort of willingness and glee as the Tories, it would still ultimately be forced to act in a similar manner, just as the Wilson government was in 1974.

As long as the Labour party are committed to working within the capitalist system for gradual change and reform, it means that they leave the capitalist class in control of the economy. As long as the capitalist class have that power, they will use it when it suits them to force governments to carry out measures which benefit themselves best. As long as they are able to do this, any reforms or advances won by reformists for the working class will only exist as long as it suits the capitalist class to allow them.

The only way a situation can be created where public services like the NHS will be an integral and unassailable feature of society, safe from the kind of attacks they are currently being subjected to, is when the political and economic power of the capitalist class to shape society as they wish is taken from them.

All the experience of history shows us that this is something they will never give up willingly. On the very few occasions that reformist, Labour-type governments have tried to curb their power, the capitalist class has used its power and influence over such institutions as the police and army to resist these attempts by force and it is only by force that power can be taken from them. That can only be done by a revolutionary working class movement.

IF HEALTH IS A THING THAT MONEY CAN BUY, THEN THE RICH WILL LIVE AND THE POOR WILL DIE.

BIRMINGHAM SIX APPEAL

By Danny O'Brien

Last month's dismissal of the appeal by six men sentenced to life imprisonment for the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings clearly shows that the phrase "British Justice" is no more than a contradiction in terms for the innocence of these men is surely beyond any sort of reasonable doubt.

Leaving aside for a minute the technical flaws in the evidence which convicted them - the subsequent discrediting of the forensic tests which the crown prosecution claimed showed that they had handled explosives, new evidence that confessions they had made had been beaten out of them as they had always claimed - surely the over-riding factor pointing to these men's innocence is seen in their actions at the time of the explosions.

All but one of them boarded a train in Birmingham just before the bombs exploded, to travel to the port of Heysham where they intended taking a boat to Ireland to attend the funeral of an IRA man, who had been brought up in the same Belfast district (New Lodge) as they themselves had been brought up.

So what the prosecution asks us to believe is that these men, constituting an IRA active service unit, having planted these bombs timed to go off shortly after their train left and therefore fully aware of the massive security operation which would be in progress by the time they reached Heysham, chose not to melt back into the anonymity of the identities they had built up in years of living normal, respectable lives in England, but to travel to a particular place where the security operation would be at its highest. And, once there, to freely admit their intention of travelling to an IRA funeral in Belfast.

To expect a trained IRA unit to behave in this fashion is stretching the bounds of possibility beyond belief. Any sort of reasonable and open-minded study of this case can come to no other conclusion that these men are innocent or, at absolute least, that there is such doubt about their guilt as to make the convictions unsafe.

RICHARD McILKENNY — ROBERT HUNTER — WILLIAM POWER

HUGH CALLAGHAN — PATRICK HILL — JOHN WALKER

1974 police photos of the Six clearly show the marks from their beatings

Yet, after 13 years, they still languish in jail, with the judiciary refusing time and time again to concede the obvious and release them. To understand the vehemance of the establishment's judges in refusing to concede any doubt in this case, we have to examine the events and circumstances which led to their convictions.

In the wave of horror and outrage, which immediately followed the bombings, the police were under immense pressure to make quick arrests. Any lead, however slight was to be vigorously followed. When they very quickly came across this group of men travelling to Belfast and, particularly when the purpose of their journey became known, they were (despite it being extremely unlikely that those actually responsible would have acted as these men did) obviously going to be vigorously interrogated.

When the now discredited forensic tests suggested that some of these men had recently handled explosives, their fate was sealed, for now that the police believed they had the guilty men, they would be willing to use any methods necessary to gain convictions. The simple fact, as anyone who has had any experience of the wrong end of the law will tell you, is that, when the police believe someone to be guilty, they will in 80 or 90 per cent of cases quite perfunctorily, use perjury and fabrication of evidence to gain convictions.

So the scene was set. What chance did these men have? What jury would believe the men's claims that the police evidence against them involved a conspiracy of perjured evidence right up to Assistant Chief Constable level. After all, what kind of men were they? Travelling to an IRA funeral, they must be involved. How could 12 men and women from the splendid tranquility of urban and rural Lancaster be expected to have any grasp of the revolutionary nature of the Nationalist ghettos of Belfast, where everyone knows someone involved in the armed struggle and attending IRA funerals is quite normal and carried out by thousands of ordinary people with no direct involvement in IRA activities whatsoever.

Then, there is the scientific evidence. How often, I wonder, has some doltish idiot from the Home Office managed to convince a jury of the most appalling nonsense simply because of the depressing tendency of working class people to look upon someone from the "professional" classes as their superior and therefore to believe what they say.

By these means, this monstrous and tragic injustice was completed. But the question still persists, why, as it becomes more and more obvious that a gross injustice is what took

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ARTHUR GAMBLES ON

A WINNER

By Kevin Fullen

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) held a ballot on 22 January for the post of Union President. The candidates were Arthur Scargill, standing for re-election and "moderate" John Walsh. British Coal had recently announced plans to introduce a six-day working week and to continue the pit closure programme which has been in motion since the end of the miners' strike of 1984/5. Scargill's election platform was one of opposition to pit closures and no co-operation with the introduction of a six-day week, saying the working week should be "shorter not longer" to give unemployed youngsters the chance of a job and a future in the mining industry. Walsh stood for negotiation on a six-day week, saying he agreed with its acceptance in principle, and on flexible working and pit closures.

Arthur Scargill speaks and the miners' vote shows they trust his word

To understand the present climate in the mining industry, it is necessary to go back to the 1984/5 strike. Arthur Scargill had been warning miners for a couple of years of a secret hit-list of mines drawn up by the employer, the National Coal Board (NCB). Scargill insisted that the NCB intended to close the mines on the list, throwing thousands of miners on the dole in the process. The NCB denied the existence of such a list, claiming that any job losses would be through natural wastage - that is by not replacing miners who retire or leave of their own accord.

On 1 March, 1984, the NCB announced it was to close Cortonwood colliery in South Yorkshire. This was despite previous NCB assurances that the pit would stay open for another five years. The miners and their families were horrified. Entire villages, such as Brampton, depended on the pit as their only source of employment. Arthur Scargill's hit-list was looking less unlikely.

STRIKE SPREADS

The NCB thought the miners of Cortonwood, who were traditionally moderate, would accept the closure but they were wrong. The local NUM branch voted unanimously to call for a strike throughout the Yorkshire coalfield in opposition to the closure of Cortonwood. The NUM were well aware that springtime was not the perfect time to go on strike. With summer approaching, the demand for coal would be down but there was no choice. If they didn't fight now, they never would.

Elsewhere, miners were already in dispute. In Scotland, miners at Polmaise had been on strike since February in opposition to closure plans there, while in South Yorkshire, four pits were already out in support of miners at the Manvers pit. The NCB, hand-in-glove with the government, were still trying to make out that Arthur Scargill was lying about the existence of a hit-list. It was becoming more and more obvious to the miners, however, that not only did the hit-list exist but that, if they did not take action now, the NCB and the government were going to ride roughshod over their pits, communities and families.

FLYING PICKETS

On 3 March, South Yorkshire miners called for the Manvers dispute to be extended throughout the coalfield in support of the men at Cortonwood. Flying pickets from the four pits already on strike in the area closed the other seven. The strike spread like wildfire and branch officials found they had no control over the enthusiasm of their members. The response of areas outside Yorkshire took the NCB and NUM alike by surprise. The one inescapable fact about the 1984/5 strike is that the rank-and-file miners told the leadership they were on strike and defied them not to make the dispute official.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Of the major coalfields, the exception was Nottinghamshire, where the majority of miners continued to work throughout the dispute, with about 3,000 in the area on strike. The government turned the full force of the state against the strikers. Pickets were literally beaten to the ground by police. Freedom of travel was restricted as police stopped picket and non-picket alike from entering Notts by blocking the roads. In scenes reminiscent of northern Ireland, police occupied whole areas, terrifying men, women and children alike.

The strike lasted for a year and this is not the time or place to go into every single detail. In March 1985, the miners staged an organised return to work. The NCB and government claimed a victory but the NUM never accepted the pit closure programme and promised to continue the fight on a pit-to-pit basis.

REPRESSIVE MEASURES

Since the strike, the NCB, now re-named British Coal have introduced a variety of repressive measures. An example is the new disciplinary code, which states that a miner can be dismissed for committing an offence away from the mine, even if the offence is completely unrelated to their employment. British Coal announced plans to introduce a six-day working week in the industry and, of course, the pit closure programme is still in operation. Arthur Scargill and the union leadership continue to announce their opposition to the employer's schemes and, in this climate of continuing dispute on these matters, Scargill resigned as Union President and stand for re-election in order to get a new mandate from the miners for his stand.

Walsh stood against him on the platform of non-confrontation and negotiation with management on these issues. The poll saw Scargill re-elected with 40,383 votes to Walsh's 34,715 - a majority of 5,668. Fifty-three per cent of NUM members voted No to pit closures, No to a six-day week, No to flexible working and No to the disciplinary code.

Soon after the poll result was announced, British Coal issued the statement "Mr. Scargill's victory will speed up pit closures." One thing it seems they cannot rely upon is the co-operation of the NUM and the rank-and-file miners.

It is true that Scargill's majority is well down on the previous election of 1981 and the establishment press have been quick to make much of this. What they do not point out is that, between 1981 and 1984, the NCB got rid of 41,000 mining jobs and, since the strike, thousands more jobs have been lost, especially in Yorkshire. In the last three years, British Coal have been careful to make the most militant miners redundant first. In these circumstances, Arthur Scargill's victory is an encouraging one.

Birmingham six - continued from page 2

place, does the judiciary adamantly insist that these men are guilty? The answer is that to now admit that these men are innocent, would be to expose the level of corruption of which the British legal system is capable. Furthermore, in view of the massive publicity surrounding this case, this corruption would be exposed on a vast, worldwide, scale.

No judge will ever admit to this corruption. Judges positions and power in society rests on the majestic and sacred position of the legal system being maintained. Rather than damage it by admitting it is capable of such a grave injustice, they consider it better to let six innocent men rot in jail. Thus, the then Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning, dismissing an earlier appeal by the men in 1980, said "If the six men win, it will mean that the police were guilty of perjury, that they were guilty of violence, that the confessions were involuntary and were improperly admitted in evidence. This is such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say that it cannot be right that these actions should go any further and that they should be struck out."

What Denning basically meant was that, if the men were telling the truth, it is such "an appalling vista" that we cannot, for one minute, even consider whether it is true or not. So, just to protect their own image of "British justice," the whole establishment buries its head in the sand and leaves the men in jail and do their best to persuade themselves and anyone who cares to listen that British justice cannot have made a mistake.

There was considerable desperation to be seen in the way in which, immediately after the appeal, so many prominent establishment figures rushed forward to proclaim their absolute conviction of the men's guilt - as if saying it often and vehemently would make it true.

The real tragedy, though, for the legal system is that its greatest apologists know better than anyone what the truth of these matters is. The three appeal court judges, earlier in their careers, will have defended victims of fabricated police evidence. Senior policemen, used to dealing with the IRA know full well that no IRA unit would ever have acted as these men did. Prison officials, too, have known these men for 13 years. They all know these men are innocent but not one of them will speak up for fear of exposing the rotten nature of the system which preserves their position of privelege in society.

Just imagine the predicament the Birmingham Six found themselves in. First being arrested - never mind it will soon all be sorted out. Then being charged - never mind, it will all be alright when it comes to court. Then conviction and - the horror of horrors, a life sentence - surely, surely, the appeal court will correct things. But no, the nightmare goes on and on. And all because the British legal system is afraid to admit what monstrous injustice it is capable of.

The letter below is an extract from a longer one recently received by the RA welfare officer.

Dear Frank

Thanks so much for your letter. At the moment, I'm fine and hope to remain so. I don't know whether to return South or stay up here. I'll be here for a while anyway.

Please can you thank everyone in RA for their thoughts and Christmas cards and possibly put a small box in the next issue of RA to say "Casaide is feeling better and would like to thank everybody for everything ... Cranbone." or words to that effect.

I am staying at my mum's so I'm being looked after really well. All the best and Happy New Year. I'll be down in London at some stage in the future, so take care and regards to all. Keep the Red Flag flying.

Casaide,
Blackpool.

The pages of Red Action are open for anyone to write about anything they wish. Please keep letters as short as possible, and send to the address at the bottom of the next column.

Dear Red Action

Have you seen the Sun column 'You the Jury?' Having manipulated your mind with 'page three girls,' or by glorifying fictitious heros like Rambo, the Sun then asks you to phone in and condemn rapists and violent offenders.

Seamus Doherty,
South London.

Dear Comrades

We are taking the initiative in calling a conference of all workers in local authorities, councils or education authorities interested in forming an industrial rank-and-file organisation. The conference will be held at the Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Rd, London N4 on Saturday 20 February, 1988 between 10.30am and 4.30pm. Although our aim is to form a national organisation, we believe that a practical first step should be the establishment of a London group and of a paper to be a voice for the rank-and-file and a source of information about the state of our industry and unions for militants. Because that paper must play a role in building up a national organisation, we welcome the participation of workers from outside London, and any contacts from whom we can gain information, and who can help distribute it.

We believe the situation for local authority workers necessitates the building of a strong, independent workplace organisation on a basis which unites workers around our common class interests, regardless of trade, grade (no managers), employer or union affiliation. Disunity due to sectionalism, paralysis by "professionals" and bureaucrats, and reluctance to fight Labour authorities as hard as any other boss, have all weakened us in the fight against the cuts and for our rights. We wish to build on organisation which can overcome these difficulties and establish working class control over public services and working conditions. Therefore we urge the fullest participation by genuine working class socialists, regardless of political affiliation.

In Solidarity,
DAM Council workers,
c/o 84b Whitechapel High St,
London E1.

Dear Red Action

I agree wholeheartedly with the Red Action article (issue no 38) on the Alton Bill. The state wishes to control people's lives and that the Alton Bill will affect working class women and not the wealthy as they have always had the right to choose but this is only part of the story.

Unequal treatment of women by a capitalist state tries to increase divisions which hold back working class people from achieving freedom in socialism. By allowing extra oppression of women by supporting or not opposing anti-women measures, we weaken any fightback on every issue.

I urge all readers to be at the National Fight the Alton Bill demonstration in March.

Yours,
Ruth Davidson
London.

SUPPORT RED ACTION

Red Action is an organisation founded by working class people to work for the furthering of the cause of Socialism. Membership is open to all who accept our political principles and pay a weekly subscription. Every member has an equal vote on all Red Action policy and decisions.

If you support our aims but do not wish to become a member, you can become a supporting member. This does not entitle you to vote, but you will receive:

1. A free subscription to the newspaper.

2. A regular internal newsletter that will keep you informed of what is going on in the organisation.

3. Notification of any Red Action activities in your area.

The cost for this is £10 for one year.

Subscriptions to the paper are still available separately. The cost is £3 pounds for ten issues. Please remember that producing a paper is a very uneconomic business and we are always very grateful for any donations, and especially grateful to anyone who can take extra copies to sell.

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THE VOICE OF REASON

Commenting on the 68 per cent pay rise for the chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), John Lyons of the Engineers and Managers Association had this to say "Only by raising the salaries at the top, can you begin to do something about the salary level lower down." I would have thought it obvious that the bigger the slice of the national cake the bosses take, the less there is left for the rest of us. In his defence, he could accuse me of basic Marxism but what is undeniable is that it is also basic mathematics.

Why don't you, just for once, tell the truth? I know you will be sacked for it but you will feel so good." - Arthur Scargill, re-elected NUM President, to a group of journalists.

There are 300,000 school leavers coming on to the market every year. The market can offer, at best, 20,000 jobs. Thirty per cent of the population live below the poverty line. More than a million people are landless and real average wages fell by 23 per cent in the first half of the 1980s. Since 1980, the United States has had a secret agreement with Kenya giving them military access to Kenyan ports and airports. The senior political figures who negotiated the agreement have done very nicely as many of them own the bars, brothels and casinos where the thousands of US servicemen who man warships in the Indian Ocean, come for rest and relaxation.

The exploitation of women as prostitutes has become as serious a problem in Kenya as it was in the Philippines under Marcos. Wealth and power is being concentrated in a smaller circle of the middle class than ever before. There have been allegations of torture and corruption levelled at the Kenyan President, who was obliged to cancel trips to Norway and Sweden as a result. So, what was the reaction of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher when she witnesed the results of this squalid relationship during her visit to Kenya last month? She said "We admire your country's peace and stability policies which recognise the worth of individual effort and personal endeavour and an economy in which private ownership and industry has been encouraged." You can see what she has in mind for us and it sounds just about as promising as 'Heckling Hitler.'

"The nurses have had a fair deal." - Tory MP Rhodes Boyson.

In 1978, Pope John Paul said, during a debate on the issue of contraception "We have been discussing birth control for about 45 minutes. If the information I have been given, the serious statistics, is accurate, then, during the period of time we have been talking, over one thousand children under five have died of malnutrition. During the next 45 minutes, while you and I look forward with anticipation to our next meal, a further thousand children will die of malnutrition. By this time tomorrow, 30,000, who at this moment are alive, will be dead of malnutrition. God does not always provide."

UNICEF's 'State of the World' report in 1988 shows that over 250,000 children under five die every week from infection and starvation. The industrial countries give $14 billion a year in aid and $13 billion a year in loans to the developing countries. They demand, in repayment, $54 billion in debts and interest on debts annually, which is a very healthy 100 per cent return on their investment. The question on every capitalist's lips is not "why do we give so much" but "why don't we give more?" Perhaps the whole enterprise should be privatised.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the abortion debate thunders on with the 'pro-life' lobby apparently blissfully ignorant of the fact that their energies are woefully misdirected. The anti-abortion lobby is large, well-organised and rich, having taken out a double-page advertisement in the Times and the Independent newspapers prior to last month's Commons vote. "We place the highest value on human life," it piously declares. Of the 52 MPs, who signed the advertisement, 36 voted for the return of capital punishment last spring. It is that type of contradiction, together with the figures quoted above by the Pope and the UNICEF report, which clearly demonstrates that the pro-life campaign is bullshit sponsored by hypocrites and that it has little to do with birth control and everything to do with social control.

A report by a committee set up in 1985 by the Roach family has rejected the findings of a coroner's inquest which found that Colin Roach, a black man found dead in a London police station five years ago, had taken his own life. He had been shot in the head and a sawn-off shotgun was by his body. His death provoked protests and more than 90 arrests. An inquest jury decided, by a majority verdict, that he had committed suicide. The report questions why, as Mr. Roach had not been wearing gloves, his fingerprints were not on the gun, why the gun was on the opposite side of the foyer when there were no signs of recoil, and why there were no marks on the wall against which the body was propped. The Roach family have demanded a public inquiry.

"In May, 1976, four Special Air Services (SAS) men, two in uniform and with blackened faces, crossed the border into the Republic in two cars, well-armed. They were stopped by a joint Army-police patrol and arrested. The police collected three Sterling sub-machine guns, two Browning pistols, a good quantity of ammunition and, more interestingly, a sawn-off, pump-action shotgun - not, as far as I am aware, standard British Army issue." - 'Pig in the middle,' Desmond Hamill.

If the average punter in this country has an image of the war in Afghanistan, it probably features a noble Pathan warrior, fierce-eyed and unruly, who snipes defiantly at Soviet tanks from a mountain-top with an ancient self-loading rifle. This is largely due to the favourable representation of the cause of the Mujahaddin guerillas by the western media, mainly because they are fighting the 'common enemy,' the Russian Communists.

If the Capitalist Americans were propping up the regime in Kabul, they would, in all probability, be presented by the same media as skulking, rabid, fanatical, women-hating ragheads, with high profiles given to infighting, dishonesty and drug-dealing. You know, the usual balanced picture. For example, the US State Department 1987 year-end report on Afghanistan admits that the guerilla-controled areas of Afghanistan are the world's second biggest opium producers. Much of it ends up as heroine on the streets of London and New York and has made the leaders of the Mujahaddin immensely wealthy and yet, far from being exploited, it is either camouflaged or ignored.

The sudden death, at the end of last year, of British Television cameraman Andy Shrozypkoviak, who was last seen struggling with some Hezbe guerillas over his camera, has drawn attention to the activities of one of the Fundamentalist factions of the resistance, Hezbe Islamis. Of the $600 million earmarked by the US Congress by the Mujahaddin, it is estimated that Hezbe gets the lions share of weapons and aid. Their leader, Gulbaddin Hekmatyar, however, denies receiving a cent and slags off his benefactor, Uncle Sam. Other guerillas regard the Hezbe as extreme, a sentiment echoed by the Vice-Chairwoman of the All-Afghanistan Women Council in Kabul, who was at university with Hekmatyar in 1971. "When women came out in public with no veil, Gulbaddin's supporters sprayed acid in their faces. When women wore stockings, they shot at our legs. Women more than men hate this man," she has said.

Critics estimate that the Hezbe hard-core numbers about 30,000 and one observer, who recently came out of Afghanistan, says there is a "fascist-style mobilisation of a very strong xenophobia, the cultivation of narrow-minded hatred against everyone except the Party." The Afghan Support Committee, which seeks to promote awareness of the war and to raise money, last year issued a poster depicting a pair of fearless-looking Mujahaddins with Kalashnikov rifles over their shoulders. The caption read "Just the sort of thoroughly reliable chaps we entrust with your charity money."

"We have got to organise ourselves against Communism. We must keep the worker from Red literature and Red ruses. We must see that his mind remains healthy." - the political philosophy of one Al Capone. 'By their friends you shall know them.'

"Whether we win or lose, there will be further attacks. Homophobia has been legitimised. Given the private lives of many Members of this House, it is quite remarkable hypocrisy." - Ken Livingstone.

In London, during the first nine months of 1987, 33 construction workers died. Nationwide, in 1986, 123 died and 3601 were seriously injured. David Eves, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Factories, had this to say :"Complacency, lack of concern, ignorance and often sheer bloody-mindedness are preventing improvements in the construction industry. Inspectors are not, by nature, cynical but they are forced to the conclusion that a substantial number of smaller firms have little regard for their workforce as human beings."

A report compiled by a couple of Professors from Durham and Sydney Universities has found that, of nine countries looked at in the study, Australia, Britain, Canada, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, Sweden and the USA, only two (Italy and France, who have a similar standard of living) have net hourly earnings lower than Britain's. It takes us 522 hours just to pay our income, longer than any of the other nations, but, in Britain in the 1980s, fewer days are lost through strikes and lockouts. The study found that Australians lost 480 days per 1000 workers through disputes, earn £7.29 per hour. Canadians, who make £9.32 an hour, were on strike 690 days per 1000 workers. Britain, who only lost 440 days per 1000 workers through strikes, get only £4.60 per hour. Less strikes, lower earnings, longer hours. Some people in this country, albeit those with a vested interest, would have you believe that these figures are unrelated.

"The Prime Minister has declared her ambition to eradicate Socialism from these shores by the end of her term in office. So far, she and Mr. Kinnock have only succeeded in eliminating it from politics. If the good work is to continue, surely it is essential to banish all closet lefties from the classroom (pupils as well as teachers) to suppress all discussion on liberal ideas in schools, and to rid library shelves once and for all, of the works of subversives like Karl Marx, Keir Hardie, William Godwin, William Corbett, Charles Dickens, H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Mrs. Gaskell, William Blake, Wordsworth, Milton, Burns, Swift, Byron, Shelley and J.C." - Terry Jones of 'Monty Python' fame

Regular readers will know that Red Action has been instrumental in setting up support groups in Britain for IRSP/INLA prisoners. On 15 January, a highly successful evening of Irish music was held in aid of the prisoners' fund with some 200 people attending. Guest speaker was Liam O'Longseigh of the IRSP prisoners' welfare department who travelled from Belfast to attend. If you would like to help us to assist IRSP/INLA prisoners and their families, please write to the IRSP Prisoners' Support Groups, Box 158, Hatfield, Herts.

Articles in R.A.

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WE ARE RED ACTION

RED ACTION IS AN ORGANISATION FOUNDED TO WORK TOWARDS THE ENDING OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOCIALIST ONE

CAPITALISM The need of capital and labour cannot ever be reconciled. In other words the quest by the employing classes for greater profit, is in eternal conflict with the demands of the working class for higher wages, shorter hours etc. It is in the obvious interest of the employer to keep wages down as low as possible while it is equally obvious that this does not serve the interests of the majority. The two systems capitalism and socialism cannot co-exist, as they are in constant struggle pulling in opposite directions, each in pursuit of its own goals. A victory for one is necessarily a defeat for the other. This is the major source of conflict in the world today. Capitalism is a system which is based on the private ownership of the means of production. This means that the factories, workplaces, natural resources etc, on which we all depend to produce the necessities of life are the private property of a few individuals, who use them to produce not what is most socially necessary, but whatever will make them the most profit. When it suits them, they are able to close down those productive resources, even though there may be great social need for what could be produced on them. Regardless of how rich a country may be in natural resources, capitalism can never provide equality of wealth due to its own inherent limitations. It is obviously impossible for everybody to become a capitalist (employer) and so to function, the system demands the creation and maintenance of an employing class and a working class, or if you like an upper class and lower class. Propping up this sytem, are the forces of social control—army, police force, civil service etc—all controlled by totally unelected and un-accountable representatives of the capitalist class.

SOCIALISM It is impossible for us today to say exactly what a socialist system will be like, as when it happens there will be millions of others involved in shaping it. However there are some features that would have to be present in any society, before we would be willing to consider it as socialist.
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP Only when all of the major productive resources and industry are taken into public ownership, will it be possible for the democratic will of the majority to ensure that they are at all times employed in the most socially useful manner. This will result in a massive increase in production and wealth.
CONTROL OF SOCIETY All those who occupy positions of power and authority will be elected by those they represent and subject to recall.
FREEDOM AND EQUALITY All will be expected to contribute to production and all will receive equal reward and have equal rights, irrespective of sex, race or creed. The state will provide adequate facilities to cater for the needs of the elderly, sick, handicapped, nursing mothers etc, who will all receive a full wage. All questions or personal morality will be free from state interference. Abortion and contraception will be legal and provided by the state. There will be freedom or worship for all religion, but no church will be allowed to interfere in state matters.

INTERNATIONALISM The capitalist economic system is linked up internationally, therefore the struggle to overthrow it is a worldwide one. All workers everywhere have the same interests. It is impossible for socialism to exist in isolation in one country, as the power of international capitalism would crush it.

NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD TO SOCIALISM Socialism cannot be achieved through the parliamentary system, because the real power in society lays not with elected MPs but with rich industrialists and the leaders of the armed forces, police judiciary etc. The present structures cannot be reformed they must be overthrown. The Labour Party does not try to end capitalism, but merely give the workers a better deal within it.

UNION STRENGTH. WE SUPPORT ANY PICKET LINE IN DEFENCE OF WORKERS LIVING STANDARDS. We support a strong organised rank and file movement within the unions. Union officials should be supported as long as they represent their members correctly. But rank and file unionists must reserve the right to take action independent of the officials when necessary.

TOTAL OPPOSITION TO RACISM AND FASCISM We opposed any movement or ideology which attempts to divide the working class on grounds of race, sex, or creed. We recognise the need to oppose fascist organisations, both ideologically and physically on the streets.

THE IRISH NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE AGAINST OUR OWN RULING CLASS We support the right of oppressed people the world over to fight back. We unconditionally support the right of the revolutionary armies The Irish Republican Army, and the Irish National Liberation Army, to engage in armed struggle to free their country from British rule. We draw great inspiration from the principled and courageous manner in which they conduct their struggle, and from the way in which they have integrated cultural and class expression into their political movement.

THE "COMMUNIST" STATES The regimes in countries such as Russia, China Cuba etc, are used as examples to try and prove socialism undesirable. In our view, although these countries have planned economies, they cannot be described as socialist. We contend that socialism cannot be implemented from above by an unaccountable ruling elite. Public ownership, freedom and democracy are all essential features of socialism and in their absence it cannot exist. We support the right of the people in these states to overthrow the leadership and implement socialist policies. At the same time however, we recognise the difficulties that states such as Nicaragua—and others past and present—face, from capitalist backed mercenary armies, military intervention, and economic sabotage, which make immediate transition to a socialist system impossible. While these states remain progressive, we will continue to support them.

THE ORGANISATION Traditionally, the structure of revolutionary socialist groups in this country, has been one where the leadership is made up of a small group of self selected academics and intellectual, who wield absolute authority over the membership. Such a structure fails, firstly because there can be no true democracy in such a set up, and corruption soon sets in, and secondly because those leading the organisation are so far removed from the realities of working class life, it cannot relate properly to that class. A revolutionary socialist organisation must be composed of and led by working class people. It must recognise that no leadership is immune from corruption and be truely democratic in its internal structures. It must be ready to work in a non sectarian manner with other socialist and progressive groups. It must present socialist politics in a manner in which working class people can identify with in their life and their work and their leisure. It must be consistent, principled and above all honest in its politics. Only then will it begin to be able to relate to the working class, most of whom today are cynical if not hostile towards the revolutionary left. We recognise that a revolutionary working class party is necessary if capitalism is to be overthrown. We are not that party, neither are those groups which claim to be it. We will work to keep alive a tradition of working class militancy, until such time as enough militants can be brought together to form that party.